

Scoundrels, saints and keepsake coins

By Roger Boye

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Is it a "distinctive and desirable" keepsake or merely an altered coin designed to "snatch money" from collectors? So goes the debate over "Freedom Pack," a serially numbered commemorative half dollar being sold by the American Numismatic Association.

Earlier this year, the ANA hired a private company to add a serial number and initials to thousands of 1993 Bill of Rights commemorative half dollars made by the U.S. Mint. Those coins now are being offered to collectors for \$19.95 each (plus \$2.50 per order for shipping) on behalf of the ANA and the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation.

ANA executives said the Freedom Pack program was designed to create excitement about coin collecting and to raise money for the ANA and the Madison foundation. But some hobbyists believe the ANA shouldn't be in the business of selling altered coinage or contrived collectibles.

One of the critics is Q. David Bowers, who once served as ANA president. In a biting Coin World commentary, he wrote that the history of U.S. commemorative coinage includes "saints as well as scoundrels" and that the ANA-Madison issue "goes into the 'scoundrel' category."